

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Please substitute the following amended claims for those identically numbered pending Claims 1-15 and enter the newly added claims 16-20:

1. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ A kit for treating incontinence by implantation of a sling extending between first and second sling ends in a body pathway comprising:

an elongate needle that is sized and shaped to extend between a needle insertion end and a needle end opposite the insertion end to enable advancement of the insertion end ~~be initially inserted~~ through an abdominal incision in a patient's body and then through the patient's body tissue to then emerge from a vaginal incision thereby creating a body pathway, the needle ~~having an insertion end and an end opposite the insertion end,~~

a sling for implantation ~~in the body during an incontinence procedure, and~~

a coupler having an axis, and extending between a first end, and a second end and formed having a lumen extending axially into the coupler from an opening in the coupler second end, the lumen ~~with surfaces for conveniently and securely connecting the coupler to~~ configured to receive and connect with the insertion end of the elongate needle following emergence from the vaginal incision by moving the coupler and insertion end of the needle together, ~~and said coupler comprising a lumen adapted to receive said~~ elongate needle into at least a portion of the lumen, and

sling association means for coupling the coupler to one of the first and second sling ends to enable passage of a portion of the sling through the body pathway as the elongate needle is retracted from the abdominal incision.

2. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 1, wherein the said needle insertion end and the lumen are mutually shaped and dimensioned to resist separation under an axially applied ~~is attached to said coupler such that the coupler and needle combination provides a~~ Separation Force of at least about fifteen pounds.

3. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 21, wherein ~~said coupler and needle combination provides a~~ the needle insertion end and the lumen are mutually shaped and dimensioned to resist separation under an axially applied Separation Force of at least about thirty pounds.

4. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 21, wherein, the needle insertion end and the lumen are mutually shaped and dimensioned to require an axially applied ~~assembly has an~~ Insertion Force of no more than about fifteen pounds.

5. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 41, wherein, the needle insertion end and the lumen are mutually shaped and dimensioned to require an axially applied ~~assembly has an~~ Insertion Force of no more than about ten pounds.

6. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 51, wherein, the needle insertion end and the lumen are mutually shaped and dimensioned to require an axially applied ~~assembly has an~~ Insertion Force of no more than about eight pounds.

7. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 1,  
wherein: ~~the coupler is sized and shaped to be connected to the needle after the~~  
~~insertion end of the needle emerges from the vaginal incision~~

at least one of the first and second sling ends further comprises a sling  
associated needle having a needle body extending a needle tip dimensioned and  
shaped to be received in and connect with at least a portion of the lumen; and

the sling association means further comprises an opening in the coupler  
first end enabling insertion of the needle tip into at least a portion of the lumen,  
whereby the sling is coupled by the coupler to the elongate needle to enable  
passage of the sling associated needle and at least a portion of the sling through  
the body pathway as the elongate needle is retracted from the abdominal  
incision.

8. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 1,  
wherein the sling includes an insertion sheath and the first end of the coupler is  
attached to the sheath by the sling association means.

9. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 1,  
wherein the tip of the insertion end of the needle is substantially blunt.

10. (Currently Amended) A coupler for use in an incontinence procedure  
that utilizes a sling extending between first and second sling ends and an  
elongate needle that is sized and shaped to extend between a needle insertion  
end and a needle end opposite the insertion end enabling advancement of the  
insertion end through an abdominal incision in a patient's body and then through  
the patient's body tissue to emerge from a vaginal incision thereby creating a  
body pathway, ~~be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then~~

~~emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end and the coupler comprising:~~

an elongate coupler body having an axis, and extending between a first body end and a second body end, and formed having a lumen extending axially from an opening in the second body end, the lumen bounded by surfaces for conveniently and securely connecting the coupler to configured to receive and connect with the insertion end of the elongate needle inserted into the body lumen by moving the ~~second end of the coupler body~~ and the insertion end of the needle together in a substantially axial fashion, and

~~a lumen configured to receive said needle~~ sling association means for coupling the elongated coupler body to one of the first and second sling ends to enable passage of a portion of the sling through the body pathway as the elongate needle is retracted from the abdominal incision.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of treating incontinence in a female patient comprising the steps of:

providing a first needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end and an end opposite the insertion end,

providing a coupler having an axis, the coupler having a first end and a second end with surfaces for ~~conveniently and securely~~ connecting the coupler to the insertion end of the needle,

providing a second needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through a vaginal incision and to then emerge from an abdominal incision; the second needle being attached to a synthetic surgical mesh having first and second ends and a plurality of holes that are sized and shaped to afford tissue ingrowth, and a removable synthetic insertion sheath associated with the surgical mesh,

creating at least one vaginal incision,  
creating at least one abdominal incision,  
initially passing the first needle through the abdominal incision and then through the vaginal incision,  
connecting the second end of the coupler to the insertion end of the first needle,  
connecting the first end of the coupler to the second needle; and  
guiding the second needle from the vaginal incision to the abdominal incision with the first needle to implant the sling.

12. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The method according to claim 411, wherein said second ~~elongate~~ needle comprises a sharp tip ~~at said insertion tip~~ and said coupler is adapted to receive and engage said sharp ~~needle tip~~ to provide a firm engagement and attachment between said second needle and said coupler.

13. (Currently Amended) ~~An assembly~~ The kit according to claim 1, wherein said elongate needle insertion end comprises predetermined surfaces, and said coupler comprises complementary internal surfaces of said lumen allowing for interlocking of said needle surface and said ~~coupler~~ lumen surfaces to provide a firm engagement and attachment between said elongate needle and said coupler.

14. (Currently Amended) A coupler according to claim 10, wherein ~~said coupler is adapted to provide a~~ the needle insertion end and the lumen are mutually shaped and dimensioned to require an axially applied Separation Force of at least about fifteen pounds when connected to said needle.

15. (Currently Amended) A coupler for use in an incontinence procedure that utilizes a sling extending between first and second sling ends and an elongate needle that is sized and shaped to extend between a needle insertion end and a needle end opposite the insertion end enabling advancement of the insertion end through an abdominal incision in a patient's body and then through the patient's body tissue to emerge from a vaginal incision thereby creating a body pathway, ~~be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end~~ the coupler comprising:

an elongate coupler body having an axis, and extending between a first end and a second end, and

means for ~~conveniently and securely~~ connecting the coupler to the insertion end of the needle by moving the second end of the coupler body and the insertion end of the needle together in a substantially axial fashion, and

a sling association structure at the first end of the coupler body configured to couple with one of the first and second sling ends to enable passage of a portion of the sling through the body pathway as the elongate needle is retracted from the abdominal incision.

16. (Newly Presented) A coupler according to claim 15, wherein:

at least one of the first and second sling ends further comprises a sling associated needle having a needle body extending to a needle tip having a needle tip surface, and

the sling association structure further comprises an elongated lumen extending from an opening in the coupler body first end axially into the coupler body, the elongated lumen having a lumen surface configured to interlock with the needle tip surface by moving the needle tip into the lumen in a substantially axial fashion.

17. (Newly Presented) A coupler according to claim 15, wherein the sling association structure further comprises a fixed attachment of one of the first and second sling ends to the first end of the coupler body.

18. (Newly Presented) A coupler according to claim 10, wherein:

at least one of the first and second sling ends further comprises a sling associated needle having a needle body extending a needle tip dimensioned and shaped to be received in and connect with at least a portion of the lumen; and

the sling association means further comprises an opening in the first body end enabling insertion of the needle tip into at least a portion of the lumen, whereby the sling is coupled by the coupler to the elongate needle to enable passage of the sling associated needle and at least a portion of the sling through the body pathway as the first elongate needle is retracted from the abdominal incision.

19. (Newly Presented) A coupler according to claim 10, wherein the sling association means further comprises a fixed attachment of one of the first and second sling ends to the first body end.

20. (Newly Presented) The kit according to claim 1, wherein the sling association means further comprises a fixed attachment of one of the first and second sling ends to the first end of the coupler body.